

The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

By ARTHUR B. REEVE

The Well-Known Novelist and the
Creator of the "Craig Kennedy" Series

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SYNOPSIS.

The New York police are mystified by a series of murders of prominent men. The principal clue to the murderer is the warning letter which is sent the victims, signed with a "clutching hand." The latest victim of the mysterious assassin is Taylor Dodge, the insurance president. His daughter, Elaine, employs Craig Kennedy, the famous detective, to try to unravel the mystery. What Kennedy accomplishes is told by his friend, Jameson, a newspaper man.

THIRD EPISODE

The Vanishing Jewels.

Banging away at my typewriter the next day, in Kennedy's laboratory, I was startled by the sudden, insistent ringing of the telephone near me.

"Hello," I answered, for Craig was at work at his table, trying still to extract some clue from the slender evidence thus far elicited in the Dodge mystery.

"Oh, Mr. Kennedy," I heard an excited voice over the wire reply, "my friend, Susie Martin, is here. Her father has just received a message from that Clutching Hand and—"

"Just a moment, Miss Dodge," I interrupted. "This is Mr. Jameson."

"Oh!" came back the voice, breathless and disappointed. "Let me have Mr. Kennedy—quick."

I had already passed the telephone to Craig and was watching him keenly as he listened over it.

He motioned to me for a pad and pencil that lay near me.

"Please read the letter again, slowly, Miss Dodge," he asked, adding, "there isn't time for me to see it—just yet. But I want it exactly. You say it is made up of separate words and type cut from newspapers and pasted on note paper?"

I handed him paper and pencil.

"All right, now, Miss Dodge, go ahead."

As he wrote he indicated to me by his eyes that he wanted me to read. I did so:

Sturtevant Martin, Jeweler,
No. 734 Fifth Avenue, New York City.
Sir—As you have failed to deliver the \$10,000, I shall rob your main diamond case at exactly noon today.

"Thank you, Miss Dodge," continued Kennedy, laying down the pencil.

"Yes, I understand perfectly—signed by that same Clutching Hand. Let me see," he pondered, looking at his watch. "It is now half-past eleven. Very well. I shall meet you and Miss

Martin at Mr. Martin's store directly."

It lacked five minutes of noon when Kennedy and I dashed up before Martin's and dismissed our taxicab.

A remarkable scene greeted us as we entered the famous jewelry shop. Involuntarily I drew back. Squarely in front of us a man had suddenly raised a revolver and leveled it at us.

"Don't!" cried a familiar voice. "That is Mr. Kennedy!"

Just then, from a little knot of people, Elaine Dodge sprang forward with a cry and seized the gun.

Kennedy turned to her, apparently not half so much concerned about the automatic that yawned at him as about the anxiety of the pretty girl who had intervened. The too eager plain-clothes man lowered the gun sheepishly.

Sturtevant Martin was a typical society business man, quietly but richly dressed.

In the excitement I glanced about hurriedly.

Directly in front of me was a sign backed up on a pillar, which read: "This store will be closed at noon to-day. Martin & Co."

All the customers were gone.

Martin himself was evidently very nervous and very much alarmed. Indeed, no one could blame him for that. Merely to have been singled out by this amazing master criminal was enough to cause panic. Already he had engaged detectives, prepared for whatever might happen, and they had advised him to leave the diamonds in the counter, clear the store and let the crooks try anything, if they dared.

Just back of us, and around the corner, as we came in, we had noticed a limousine which had driven up. Three faultlessly attired handies had entered a doorway down the street, as we learned afterward, apparently going to a fashionable tailor's which occupied the second floor of the old-fashioned building, the first floor having been renovated and made ready for renting.

Had we been there a moment sooner we might have seen, I suppose, that one of them nodded to a taxicab driver, who was standing at a public hack stand a few feet up the block.

The driver nodded unostentatiously back at the man.

In spite of the excitement, Kennedy quietly examined the showcase, which was, indeed, a veritable treasure store of brilliants.

Slowly the hands of the clock came nearer together at noon.

We all gathered about the showcase, with its glittering hoard of wealth, forming a circle at a respectable distance.

In deep-tongued tones the clock played the chords written, I believe, by Handel. Then it began striking.

Nothing had happened.

We all breathed a sigh of relief.

"Well, it is still there!" exclaimed Martin, pointing at the showcase with a forced laugh.

Suddenly came a rending and crashing sound. It seemed as if the very floor on which we stood was giving way.

The showcase, with all its priceless contents, went smashing into the cellar below.

The flooring beneath the case had been cut through!

All crowded forward, gazing at the black, yawning cavern.

Down below, three men, covered with smocks and their faces hidden by masks, had knocked the props away from the ceiling of the cellar, which they had sawed almost through at their leisure, and the showcase had landed eight or ten feet below, shivering into a thousand bits.

A volley of shots whizzed past us, and another. While one crook was hastily stuffing the untold wealth of jewels into a burlap bag the others had drawn revolvers and were firing up through the hole in the floor desperately.

"Look out!" cried someone behind us before we could recover from our first surprise and return the fire.

One of the desperadoes had taken a bomb from under his smock, lighted it and thrown it up through the hole in the floor.

It sailed up over our heads and landed near our little group, on the floor, the fuse sputtering ominously.

I heard an exclamation of fear from Elaine.

Kennedy had pushed his way past us and picked up the deadly infernal machine in his bare hands.

I watched him, fascinated. As near as he dared, he approached the hole in the floor, still holding the thing off at arm's length. Would he never throw it?

He was coolly holding it, allowing the fuse to burn down closer to the explosion point.

It was now within less than an inch of sure death.

Suddenly he raised it and hurled the deadly thing down through the hole.

We could hear the imprecations of the crooks as it struck the cellar floor, near them.

"Leave the store—quick!" rang out Kennedy's voice.

Down below the crooks were beating a hasty retreat through a secret entrance which they had effected.

"The bag! The bag!" we could hear one of them bellow.

"The bomb—run!" cried another voice gruffly.

The explosion that followed lifted us fairly off our feet.

As the smoke from the explosion cleared away, Kennedy could be seen, the first to run forward.

Meanwhile Martin's detectives had rushed down a flight of back stairs that led into a coal cellar. With coal shovels and bars, anything they could lay hands on, they attacked the door that opened forward from the coal cellar into the front basement where the robbers had been.

A moment Kennedy and Bennett passed on the brink of the abyss which the bomb had made, waiting for the smoke to decrease. Then they began to climb down cautiously over the piled-up wreckage.

The explosion had set the basement afire, but the fire had not gained much headway by the time they reached the basement. Quickly Kennedy ran to the door into the coal cellar and opened it.

From the other side Martin, followed by the police and the detectives, burst in.

"Fire!" cried one of the policemen, leaping back to turn in an alarm from the special apparatus upstairs.

All except Martin began beating out the flames, using such weapons as they already held in their hands to better down the door.

To Martin there was one thing paramount—the jewels.

In the midst of the confusion, Elaine, closely followed by her friend, Susie, made her way fearlessly into the stifling of smoke down the stairs.

"There are your jewels, Mr. Martin," cried Kennedy, kicking the precious burlap bag with his foot as if it had been so much ordinary merchandise, and turning toward what was in his mind the most important thing at stake—the direction taken by the agents of the Clutching Hand.

"Thank heaven!" ejaculated Martin, fairly bounding on the bag and tearing it open. "They didn't get away with them—after all!" he exclaimed, examining the contents with satisfaction.

Events were moving rapidly.

The limousine had been standing innocently enough at the curb near the corner, with the taxicab close behind it.

Less than ten minutes after they had entered, three well-dressed men came out of the vacant shop, apparently from the tailor's above, and climbed leisurely into their car.

As the last one entered, he half turned to the taxicab driver, hiding from passers-by the sign of the Clutching Hand, which the taxicab driver returned in the same manner. Then the big car whirled up the avenue.

All this we learned later from a street sweeper who was at work near by.

Down below, while the police and detectives were putting out the fire, Kennedy was examining the wall of the cellar, looking for the spot where the crooks had escaped.

"A secret door!" he exclaimed, as he paused after tapping along the wall to determine its character. "You can see how the force of the explosion has loosened it."

Sure enough, when he pointed it out to us, it was plainly visible. One of the detectives picked up a crowbar and others, still with the hastily selected implements they had seized to fight the fire, started in to pry it open.

As it yielded Kennedy rushed his way through; Elaine, always utterly fearless, followed. Then the rest of us went through.

There seemed to be nothing, however, that would help us in the cellar next door, and Kennedy mounted the steps of a stairway in the rear.

The stairway led to a sort of storeroom, full of barrels and boxes, but otherwise characterless. When I arrived Kennedy was gingerly holding up the smocks which the crooks had worn.

"We're on the right trail," commented Elaine as he showed them to her, "but where do you suppose the owners are?"

Craig shrugged his shoulders and gave a quick look about. "Evidently they came in from and went away by the street," he observed, hurrying to the door, followed by Elaine.

On the sidewalk he gazed up the avenue, then catching sight of the street cleaner, called to him.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, stolidly, looking up from his work. "I see three gentlemen come out and get into an automobile."

"Which way did they go?" asked Kennedy.

For answer the man jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the general direction uptown.

With keen glance, Kennedy strained his eyes. Far up the avenue he could descry the car threading its way in and out among the others, just about disappearing.

A moment later Craig caught sight of the vacant taxicab and crooked his finger at the driver, who answered promptly by cranking his engine.

"You saw that limousine standing here?" asked Craig.

"Yes," nodded the chauffeur, with a show of alertness.

"Well, follow it," ordered Kennedy, jumping into the cab.

"Yes, sir."

Craig was just about to close the door when a slight figure flashed past us and a dainty foot was placed on the step.

"Please, Mr. Kennedy," pleaded Elaine. "Let me go. They may lead to my father's slayer."

She said it so earnestly that Craig could scarcely have resisted if he had wanted to do so.

Just as Elaine and Kennedy were moving off I came out of the vacant store with Bennett and the detectives.

"Craig!" I cried. "Where are you going?"

Kennedy stuck his head out of the window, and I am quite sure that he was not altogether displeased that I was not with him.

"Chasing that limousine," he shouted back. "Follow us in another car."

A moment later he and Elaine were gone.

Bennett and I looked about.

"There are a couple of cabs—down there," I pointed out at the other end of the block. "I'll take one, you take the other."

Who, besides Bennett, went in the other car I don't know, but it made no difference for we soon lost them. Our driver, however, was a really clever fellow. Far ahead now we could see the limousine drive around a corner, making a dangerous swerve. Kennedy's cab followed, skidding dangerously near a pole.

But the taxicab was no match for

the powerful limousine. On uptown they went, the only thing preventing the limousine from escaping being the fear of pursuit by traffic police if the driver let out speed. They were content to manage to keep just far enough ahead to be out of danger of having Kennedy overhaul them. As for us, we followed as best we could, on uptown, past the city line, and out into the country.

There Kennedy lost sight altogether of the car he was trailing. Worse than that, we lost sight of Kennedy. Still we kept on blindly, trusting to luck and common sense in picking the road.

I was peering ahead over the driver's shoulder, the window down, trying to direct him, when we approached a fork in the road. Here was a dilemma which must be decided at once, rightly or wrongly.

As we neared the crossroad I gave an involuntary exclamation. Beside the road, almost on it, lay the figure of a man. Our driver pulled up with a jerk and I was out of the car in an instant.

There lay Kennedy! Someone had blackjacked him. He was groaning and just beginning to show signs of consciousness as I bent over.

"What's the matter, old man?" I asked, helping him to his feet.

He looked about dazed a moment, then seeing me and comprehending, he pointed excitedly, but vaguely.

"Elaine!" he cried. "They've kidnapped Elaine!"

What had really happened, as we learned later from Elaine and others, was that when the crossroads was reached the three crooks in the limousine had stopped long enough to speak to an accomplice stationed there, according to their plan for a getaway. He was a tough-looking individual who might have been hobnobbing it to the city.

When, a few minutes later, Kennedy and Elaine had approached the fork, their driver had slowed up, as if

Elaine, equal to anything, did so, and Craig bent down and cranked the engine. It started on the first spin.

"See," he exclaimed. "There wasn't anything, after all."

He took a step toward the taxicab. "Mr. Kennedy—look out!" cried Elaine.

Craig turned. But it was too late. The rough-looking fellow had awakened to life. Suddenly he stepped up behind Kennedy with a blackjack. As the heavy weight descended Craig crumpled up on the ground unconscious.

With a scream, Elaine turned and started to run. But the chauffeur seized her arm.

"Say, bo," he asked of the rough fellow, "what does Clutching Hand want with her? Quick! There's another cab likely to be along in a moment with that fellow Jameson in it."

The rough fellow, with an oath, seized her and dragged her into the taxicab. "Go ahead!" he growled, indicating the road.

And away they sped, leaving Kennedy unconscious on the side of the road, where we found him.

"What are we to do?" I asked helplessly of Kennedy, when we had at last got him on his feet.

His head still ringing from the force of the blow of the blackjack, Craig stooped down, then knelt in the dust of the road, then ran ahead a bit, where it was somewhat muddy.

"Which way—which way?" he muttered to himself.

I thought perhaps the blow had affected him and leaned over to see what he was doing. Instead, he was studying the marks made by the tire of the Clutching Hand cab.

More slowly now and carefully, we proceeded, for a mistake meant losing the trail of Elaine.

We came to another crossroads and the driver glanced at Craig. "Stop!" he ordered.

In another instant he was down in

listening. We listened also. There certainly was a most peculiar noise inside that tank.

Was it a muffled scream? Kennedy reached down and picked up a rock, hitting the tank with a resounding blow. As the echo died down, he listened again.

Yes, there was a sound—a scream, perhaps—a woman's voice, faint, but unmistakable.

I looked at his face inquiringly. Without a word I read in it the confirmation of the thought that had flashed into my mind.

Elaine Dodge was inside!

First had come the limousine, with its three bandits, to the spot fixed on as a rendezvous. Later had come the taxicab. As it hove into sight, the three well-dressed crooks had drawn revolvers, thinking perhaps the plan for getting rid of Kennedy might possibly have miscarried. But the taxicab driver and the rough-faced fellow had reassured them with the sign of the Clutching Hand, and the revolvers were lowered.

As they parleyed hastily, the roughneck and the fake chauffeur lifted Elaine out of the taxi. She was bound and gagged.

"Well, now we've got her, what shall we do with her?" asked one.

"It's got to be quick. There's another cab," put in the driver.

"The deuce with that!"

"The deuce with nothing," he returned. "That fellow Kennedy's a clever one. He may come to. If he does, he won't miss us. Quick, now!"

"See," cried the third. "See that old boiler down there at the edge of the water? Why not put her in there? No one'll ever think to look in such a place."

With a hasty expression of approval, the roughneck picked Elaine up bodily, still struggling vainly, and together they carried her, bound and gagged, to the tank. The opening, which was toward the water, was small, but they managed, roughly, to thrust her in.

A moment later and they had rolled up a huge boulder against the small entrance, bracing it so that it would be impossible for her to get out from the inside. Then they drove off hastily.

Frantically Elaine managed to loosen the gag. She screamed. Her voice seemed to be bound around by the iron walls as she was herself. She shuddered. The water was rising—had reached her chest, and was still rising, slowly, inexorably.

What was that? Silence! Or was someone outside?

Coolly, in spite of the emergency, Kennedy took in the perilous situation.

The lower end of the boiler, which was on a slant on the rapidly shelving beach, was now completely under water and impossible to get at. Besides, the opening was small, too small.

Kennedy gazed about frantically and his eye caught the sign on the factory:

OXYACETYLENE WELDING CO.

"Come, Walter," he cried, running up the shore.

A moment later, breathless, we reached the doorway. It was, of course, locked. Kennedy whipped out his revolver and several well-directed shots through the keyhole smashed the lock. We put our shoulders to it and swung the door open, entering the factory.

Beside a work bench stood two long cylinders, studded with bolts.

"That's what I'm looking for," exclaimed Craig. "Here, Walter, take one. I'll take the other—and the tubes—and—"

We ran, for there was no time to lose. As nearly as I could estimate it, the water must now be slowly closing over Elaine.

"What is it?" I asked, as he joined up the tubes from the tanks to the peculiar hooklike apparatus he carried.

"An oxyacetylene blowpipe," he muttered back feverishly. "Used for welding and cutting, too," he added.

With a light he touched the nozzle. Instantly a hissing, blinding flame—needle made the steel under it incandescent. The terrific heat from one nozzle made the steel glow. The stream of oxygen from the second completely consumed the hot metal.

Kennedy was actually cutting out a huge hole in the still exposed surface of the tank—all around, except for a few inches, to prevent the heavy piece from falling inward.

As Kennedy carefully bent outward the section of the tank which he had cut, he quickly reached down and lifted Elaine, unconscious, out of the water.

Gently he laid her on the sand. It was the work of only a moment to cut the cords that bound her hands.

There she lay, pale and still. Was she dead?

Kennedy worked frantically to revive her.

At last, slowly, the color seemed to return to her pale lips. Her eyelids fluttered. Then her great, deep eyes opened.

As she looked up and caught sight of Craig bending anxiously over her, she seemed to comprehend. For a moment both were silent. Then Elaine reached up and took his hand.

"Craig," she whispered, "you've saved my life!"

Her tone was eloquent.

"Elaine," he whispered, still gazing down into her wonderful eyes, "the Clutching Hand shall pay for this! It is a fight to a finish between us!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



Kennedy Quietly Examined the Showcase.

In doubt which way to go. Craig had stuck his head out of the window, as I had done, and, seeing the crossroads, had told the chauffeur to stop. There stood the hobo.

"Did a car pass here, just now—a big car?" called Craig.

The man put his hand to his ear, as if only half comprehending.

"Which way did the big car go?" repeated Kennedy.

The hobo approached the taxicab sullenly, as if he had a grudge against cars in general.

One question after another elicited little that could be construed as intelligence. If Craig had only been able to see, he would have found out that, with his back toward the taxicab driver, the hobo held one hand behind him and made the sign of the Clutching Hand, glancing surreptitiously at the driver to catch the answering sign, while Craig gazed earnestly up the two roads.

At last Craig gave him up as hopeless. "Well—go ahead—that way," he indicated, picking the most likely road.

As the chauffeur was about to start he stalled his engine.

"Hurry!" urged Craig, exasperated at the delays.

The driver got out and tried to crank the engine. Again and again he turned it over, but somehow it refused to start. Then he lifted the hood and began to tinker.

"What's the matter?" asked Craig, impatiently jumping out and bending over the engine, too.

The driver shrugged his shoulders. "Must be something wrong with the ignition, I guess," he replied.

Kennedy looked the car over hastily. "I can't see anything wrong," he frowned.

"Well, there is," growled the driver. "Precious minutes were speeding away as they argued. Finally with his characteristic energy, Kennedy put the taxicab driver aside.

"Let me try it," he said. "Miss Dodge, will you arrange that spark and throttle?"

the dirt, examining the road for marks.

"That way!" he indicated, leaping back to the running board.

We piled back into the car and proceeded under Kennedy's direction, as fast as he would permit. So it continued, perhaps for a couple of hours.

At last Kennedy stopped the cab and slowly directed the driver to veer into an open space that looked particularly lonesome. Near it stood a one-story brick factory building, closed, but not abandoned.

As I looked about at the unattractive scene, Kennedy already was down on his knees